

POLICY DIGEST, January 2015

This digest presents a summary of the latest policy developments at a national and regional level of strategic relevance to Northumberland and highlights Government announcements of relevance to local government. This issue covers period from Monday 5 January and Friday 30 January. Previous and subsequent editions are available at www.northumberland.gov.uk/policy.

Policy Development	Action	Lead
PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY		
<p>Eric Pickles to cut snooping powers of Council Tax inspectors (27 January 2015)</p> <p>Secretary of State for Local Government, Eric Pickles, has published legislative proposals to cut the number of government officials who can demand entry to homes and businesses even further. Using powers under the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, he will propose changing the law that officials from the Valuation Office Agency, an arm of HM Revenue and Customs, should no longer have automatic right of entry into homes and businesses in order to value them for Council Tax and business rates. It is proposed to change the law in this Parliament, subject to the ratification of an order by Parliament.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/eric-pickles-to-cut-snooping-powers-of-council-tax-inspectors</p>	For information	
PLACE SHAPING		
<p>New plan to secure rail services for the north (8 January 2015)</p> <p>Rail services will be maintained and capacity on key routes will be increased as part of a plan to secure additional rolling stock for the north of England, Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin has announced. The plan means that existing rail services will be maintained from May 2015. This follows a decision by rolling stock leasing company Porterbrook to move trains running on the TransPennine Express route to the Chiltern franchise. In addition, the Department for Transport has agreed a plan with the operators of the Northern and TransPennine Express routes to offer more carriages and seats.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-plan-to-secure-rail-services-for-the-north</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning, Economy and Housing

<p>New fund to help councils crack down on unauthorised development (10 January 2015)</p> <p>Councils are set to receive a £1 million boost to their efforts to crack down on unauthorised development and ensure everyone plays by the planning rules, Communities Secretary Eric Pickles has said. The new Planning Enforcement Fund gives councils funding towards the legal costs in seeking a court injunction against those who flout planning laws and cause misery to local residents. In the past councils had to shoulder the cost of court injunctions. Now, they can apply for up to £10,000 per case to secure a court injunction. Whilst most planning breaches are resolved without use of the courts, over the last 10 years local planning authorities in England have issued an average of 60 injunctions a year. These are typically for serious breaches of planning rules. The £1 million fund now provides a significant boost to the capacity of local authorities to take legal action against those flouting planning rules</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-fund-to-help-councils-crack-down-on-unauthorised-development</p>	For information	Karen Ledger, Head of Planning and Development Services
<p>£4 million for local transport in rural and isolated areas (14 January 2015)</p> <p>Transport Minister Baroness Kramer has announced that up to £4 million is being made available to pilot new and better ways of delivering joined-up local transport in rural and isolated areas. The Department for Transport fund aims to promote a better coordination and utilisation of all available transport services in local communities. Around £2 billion of public funding for transport services is currently provided each year by a number of agencies. However, this funding is often not co-ordinated or integrated at a local level, resulting in duplication and potential waste of public funding. The pilot funding will allow local authorities to show how transport resources can be used more efficiently by bringing organisations together, improving vital transport services in local areas. The fund is exclusively for rural and isolated urban areas and the closing date for bids is the 11 February 2015. The winners will be announced in March 2015.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/4-million-for-local-transport-in-rural-and-isolated-areas</p>	Officers to consider making an application for pilot status	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning, Economy and Housing

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY		
<p>Government puts rocket boosters under plans to get troubled families back to work (18 January 2015)</p> <p>Eric Pickles and Iain Duncan Smith have announced plans to do more to get some of England's hardest to help families back to work. The communities and work and pensions secretaries are to more than double the number of specialist employment advisers in the government's expanded Troubled Families programme. The number of welfare to work specialists seconded from Jobcentre Plus directly into councils' troubled families teams will go from 150 to over 300 from April this year as part of efforts to turn around the lives of up to 400,000 tough to tackle households. The new £10 million investment, jointly funded by both the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions, will build on the success of the current programme which has now seen over 8,000 members of troubled families hold down a job for 3 months or more, a 6-fold increase on the previous year.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-puts-rocket-boosters-under-plans-to-get-troubled-families-back-to-work</p>	For information	

<p>Cities Outlook 2015</p> <p>This report from the Centre for Cities shows the gap between Britain's best- and worst-performing cities has dramatically widened since 2004 – creating a two-tier economy of dynamism and decline. It finds that for every 12 net new jobs created between 2004 and 2013 in cities in the South of England, only one was created in cities throughout the rest of Great Britain. Given the scale of the challenge, it calls on all parties to ensure their visions for growing cities are based on significant devolution of both fiscal and structural power, providing incentives for cities to support economic growth, and giving greater flexibility to ensure money can be spent where it is most needed.</p> <p>http://www.centreforcities.org/press/cities-outlook-2015-press-release/</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning, Economy and Housing
<p>Deputy PM brings buildings back to life with high street names in the north (26 January 2015)</p> <p>With local support, Nick Clegg is helping bring empty buildings back to life in the north — an idea from the Northern Futures initiative. Just 2 months after his Northern Futures initiative highlighted the need to tackle the chronic problem of unused sites sitting empty across the region, Nick Clegg and local charities have formed a working group with Legal & General, The Co-operative Group, Network Rail, Capital and Centric, Carillion and others. Making empty buildings available to charities, community groups, artists and entrepreneurs will help give a boost to local projects, stimulate growth in local businesses and create jobs. The group is responding to calls to breathe new life into empty sites by arranging for local entrepreneurs, artists and community groups to use them on a temporary basis to test their ideas.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/deputy-pm-brings-buildings-back-to-life-with-high-street-names-in-the-north</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning, Economy and Housing
<p>Record funding for 36 seaside towns that will kick-start jobs and apprenticeships (26 January 2015)</p> <p>Seaside attractions across England are to benefit from a record £36 million government investment to boost growth in coastal areas. More than £90 million has been allocated by the Coastal Communities Fund to projects around England's coast, in total these will create more than 11,000 jobs, provide over 5,000 training places and apprenticeships for young people and attract more than £128 million in other investment. This announcement brings the total of the Coastal Communities Fund spending to £116 million. Within this tranche, the Port of Blyth in Northumberland receives £500,000 to create a modern vocational centre for engineering and offshore training, as well as training in water sports for visitors and local community organisations, in Blyth. This will create 7 jobs.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/record-funding-for-36-seaside-towns-that-will-kick-start-jobs-and-apprenticeships</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning, Economy and Housing
<p>Growth Deals gain momentum: firing up local economies (29 January 2015)</p> <p>As part of its long-term plan to build a stronger economy and a fairer society, the government is investing a further £1 billion in local economies across England by expanding the successful Growth Deals. Agreement has been reached with all 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to expand significantly the Growth Deals that were struck last July. The funding, to be devolved from central government into the hands of local authorities, businesses, colleges and universities will help to train young people, create thousands of new jobs, build thousands of new homes and start hundreds of infrastructure project. The additional projects for the North East include the upgrading of facilities at Northumberland College. In addition, the Government is committed in principle to support the development of Dun Cow Quay in Blyth.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/growth-deals-gain-momentum-firing-up-local-economies</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning, Economy and Housing

HEALTH & WELLBEING		
<p>The Forward View into action: Planning for 2015/16</p> <p>Leaders of the NHS in England have published planning guidance for the NHS, setting out the steps to be taken during 2015/16 to start delivering the NHS Five Year Forward View. NHS England, Monitor, the NHS Trust Development Authority, the Care Quality Commission, Public Health England and Health Education England have come together to issue the joint guidance, coordinating and establishing a firm foundation for longer term transformation of the NHS. The guidance is backed by the recently-announced £1.98 billion of additional funding, with specific financial allocations for healthcare commissioners also announced. The coordinated guidance includes a new support package for GPs, plans for a radical upgrade in prevention of illness, and new access and treatment standards for mental health services.</p> <p>http://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/forward-view/</p>	For information	Penny Spring, Director of Public Health
<p>New Mental Health Act code of practice (15 January 2015)</p> <p>The Government has published a revised code of practice for the Mental Health Act 1983 provides guidance for professionals. It shows professionals how to carry out their roles and responsibilities under the Mental Health Act 1983, to ensure that all patients receive high quality and safe care. There have been significant changes in legislation, case law, policy and professional practice since the last code was published in 2008. The revised code aims to provide stronger protection for patients and clarify roles, rights and responsibilities. This includes: involving the patient and, where appropriate, their families and carers in discussions about the patient's care at every stage; providing personalised care; and minimising the use of inappropriate blanket restrictions, restrictive interventions and the use of police cells as places of safety.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-mental-health-act-code-of-practice</p>	For information	Penny Spring, Director of Public Health
<p>Poverty and devolution: The role of devolved governments in a strong national social security system</p> <p>Levels and forms of poverty vary greatly across the UK. This report from IPPR North assesses the impact of different localised approaches to reducing poverty, and which aspects of the UK social security system would be best suited for devolution to the national governments. It argues for maintaining a strong central welfare state. The redistributive functions of government require pooling risk across the largest possible area, to mitigate the asymmetrical impact of different changes in economic conditions. However, there are some benefits could be devolved in a safe and effective fashion, to improve the devolved governments' ability to respond to local circumstances. In particular the report recommends further investigation of devolution options in two key areas of the social security system: housing benefit and employment support and the Work Programme.</p> <p>http://www.ippr.org/publications/poverty-and-devolution-the-role-of-devolved-governments-in-a-strong-national-social-security-system</p>	For information	

<p>Winterbourne View: 2 years on</p> <p>The government committed in Transforming care: a national response to Winterbourne View Hospital to produce a report 2 years later setting out the progress that had been made to ensure what happened at Winterbourne View is not repeated. 'This document is a collective account from partners across the health and care system, which describes the work that has taken place. It provides an update against the actions in the original report. It also shows that not as much progress has been made as was intended. To achieve faster and more sustainable progress, a better co-ordinated approach will be put in place that takes into consideration the recommendations of Winterbourne View – a time for change (2014) by Sir Stephen Bubb.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/winterbourne-view-2-years-on</p>	For information	Jane Bowie, Head of Safeguarding and Strategic Commissioning
STRONGER COMMUNITIES		
<p>Coalition ministers change the law to protect the Great British pub (26 January 2015)</p> <p>Ministers have announced they will change the law to provide even greater protection for pubs which play a crucial role at the heart of our communities. This action will stop valued community pubs from being demolished or converted into different uses against the will of local people. Ministers have already abolished the unpopular beer and alcohol duty escalators, cut business taxes for pubs and armed people with the power to list their local as an asset of community value. So far more than 600 locals have already been listed as assets of community value and therefore protected from being sold off under the nose of the community they serve. People who list their local pubs are then given 6 months and the support they need to come together with a community bid to buy it should it be put up for sale. Due to the passion demonstrated for pubs by the significant numbers listed as assets, ministers believe communities should also be given the right to consider planning applications when changes are proposed to the use of their listed locals. This will mean that in future where a pub is listed as an asset of community value, a planning application will be required for the change of use or demolition of a pub.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coalition-ministers-change-the-law-to-protect-the-great-british-pub</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning, Economy and Housing
<p>Funding boost for councils putting communities back in control (28 January 2015)</p> <p>Projects which help councils deliver more for less by working with local communities and neighbourhood groups to redesign services to address their needs have today been awarded a share of £2 million to develop them further. Communities Minister Stephen Williams announced 24 successful bidders for Delivering Differently in Neighbourhoods funding after they set out innovative approaches to transform services, drawing on the energy and expertise of local people to help to reduce reliance on public services and cut waste - giving local people a greater role in solving problems in their local area by themselves.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-boost-for-councils-putting-communities-back-in-control</p>	For information	Paul Jones, Head of Neighbourhood Services

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